DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 294 181 CS 211 163

AUTHOR Bordner, Marsha S., Ed.
TITLE Strategies in Composition: Ideas That Work in the Classroom.
INSTITUTION Clark Technical Coll., Springfield, Ohio.
PUB DATE 88
NOTE 41p.; Project funded jointly by the Ohio Board of Regents, participating high schools, and Clark Technical College.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052) -- Collected Works - General (020)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Creative Writing; *Educational Strategies; English Instruction; Higher Education; High Schools; Teaching Methods; *Writing (Composition); Writing Exercises; Writing Instruction; Writing Processes; Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS Writing Contexts; *Writing Strategies

ABSTRACT

This collection of essays by college and high school faculty represents a variety of practical approaches that can be used in composition classes. The essays and their authors are as follows (1) "Undercover Preparation" (Judy Anderson); (2) "Paragraph Development from Visualization: 'a paragraph ain't nothing but a sandwich!'" (Frances Noel Barber); (3) "A Pre-Writing Strategy" (Marsha S. Bordner); (4) "Preparing the Way to Writing an Argumentative-Persuasion Essay" (Ellen Carey); (5) "Today in History" (Janet Gabbard); (6) "The Obituary" (Terry Hartley); (7) "A Progressive Portfolio" (Cynthia Heitman); (8) "Graveyards Needn't be Grave--or, Writing Epitaphs for Writing Proficiency" (Nancy Hempstead); (9) "The Use of a Journal in Teaching College Physics" (Bob Henscheid); (10) "Teaching Grammar" (Cindy Herndon); (11) "Experiment in Free Writing" (Angie Holloway); (12) "Evolution of Evaluation and Me" (Mark Hopkins); (13) "The Conference Dilemma" (Margaret Howell); (14) "Writing an Article on a Sports Event" (Denny Lane); (15) "Conquering Trauma with Group Writing" (Kim Music); (16) "Using Small Group Collaboration to Assess Student Writing" (Steven Olson); (17) "Using Writing Groups in a Writing Lab" (Carmen Olszewski); (18) "Learning Writing Skills through the Family Genealogy" (Sarma Orlowski); (19) "The Fantastic Me--Front Page News" (Ann N. Pearson); (20) "A Strategy for Giving Final Exams to Developmental Students" (Jackie Reeb); (21) "Objective Evaluation of Papers" (Linda Schmitmeyer); (22) "Personality Games as Preparation for Character Analysis" (Margaret E. Tabor); (23) "A Weekly Paragraph Assignment" (Rob Umble); and (24) "Planning Sheets for Formal Papers" (Janette Yoder). Attached to some papers are sample teaching aids illustrating the techniques described. (MS)

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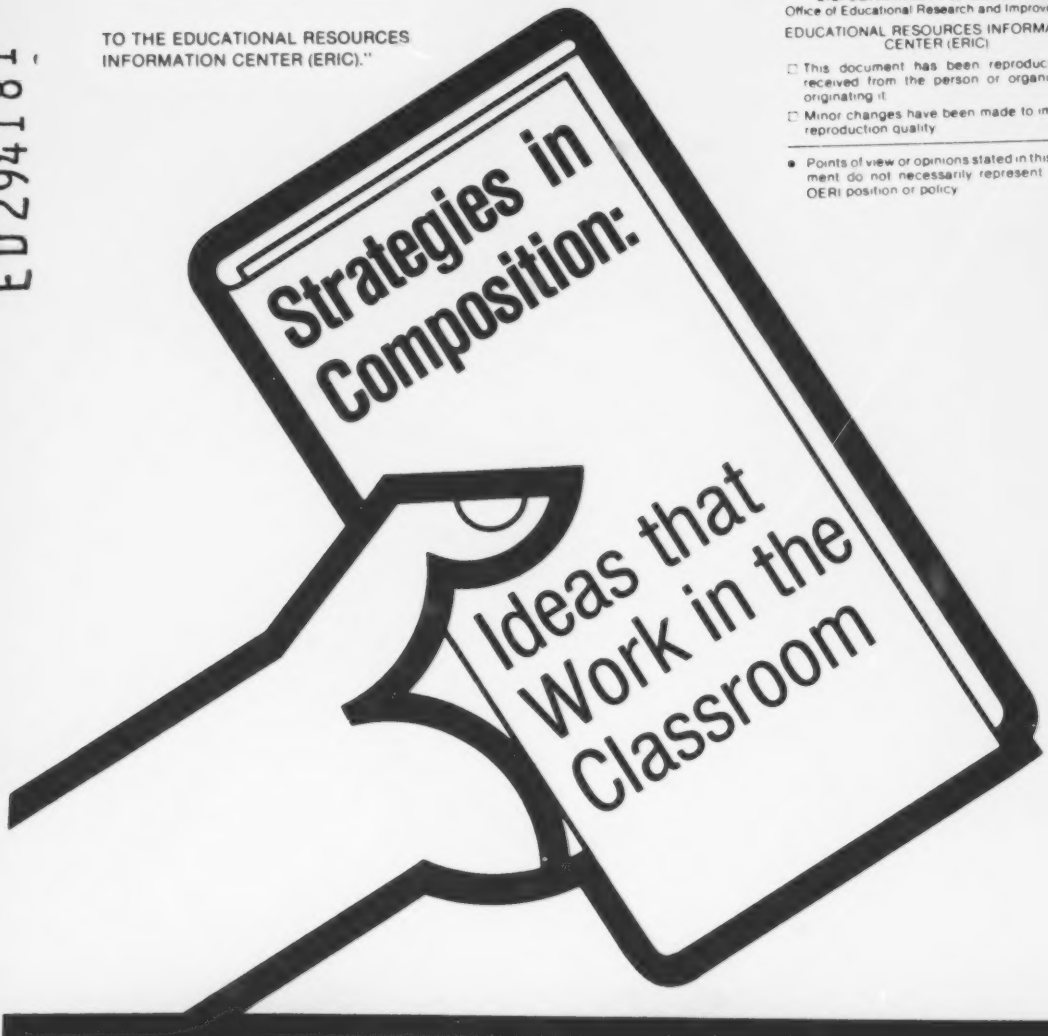

Early English Composition Assessment Program

CLARK TECHNICAL COLLEGE

CS211163

Strategies in Composition:
Ideas that Work in the Classroom

Editor: Marsha S. Bordner, Ph.D.
Director, Clark Technical College's EECAP

"Strategies in Composition: Ideas that Work in the Classroom" is a collection of essays by college and high school faculty who have worked together for two years on a grant funded jointly by the Ohio Board of Regents, the participating high schools, and Clark Technical College. These essays represent the culmination of the project and the group's belief that composition can be taught well through a variety of approaches.

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Undercover Preparation

by Judith Anderson
Clark Technical College

It was a cold winter morning, and I didn't want to get up, but the clock radio was already reminding me of the time. By going over what I had to do that day while I burrowed under the covers, I thought I could spend another five minutes warm and comfortable. I groaned internally as I thought that I had to deal with parallel structure — something my students always have trouble with. In the background, the radio continued to remind me to stay awake. A song I like came on, so I listened. "Morning has broken like the first morning, blackbird has spoken, like the first bird …." The lyrics clicked into my mind — PARALLEL STRUCTURE! That got me up and fiddling with the dial. Song lyrics don't scan unless they are parallel. What would Kenny Rogers do if he had to sing "You've got to know when you ought to walk away and when it would be better to run?"

I presented my students with a number of mangled songs that morning, and they managed not only to revise them but to see why they needed to be revised.

I went on to ruin songs by John Lennon, Judy Collins, Arlo Guthrie, and even Bruce Springsteen. Sorry about that Bruce. If you're angry, I'll apologize in person.

Paragraph Development From Visualization: "a paragraph ain't nothing but a sandwich!"

by Frances Noel Barber
Cedarville High School

Through visualization, I have found that the student will be better able to develop paragraphs with proper paragraph form.

Since theory has it that right brain-oriented students learn best through the use of images, colors, and pictures, then creating a picture of perfect paragraph form for these students reinforces their learning. (An added plus is that left brain-oriented students also learn from visualization.)

After initially discussing proper paragraph form for formal compositions (i.e., students read examples of good paragraphs), I tell the class that we're going to build a paragraph together. One person comes to the board to act as class secretary as we jot down ideas. Then we begin to turn our "idea sketch" into a paragraph. "What will our topic sentence be?" I ask, and as I do, I take out a hamburger bun. When the class comes up with an appropriate topic sentence, the class secretary duly records it on the board. As details become sentences on our board paragraph, I add item after item to my sandwich. Whenever the students connect sentences with a transition, I slap on mustard or mayo. Pretty soon I have a good sized sandwich! When they add a concluding sentence to their board paragraph, I finish my sandwich by adding a bottom bun. "The idea," I say, "is that a good paragraph is like a good sandwich."

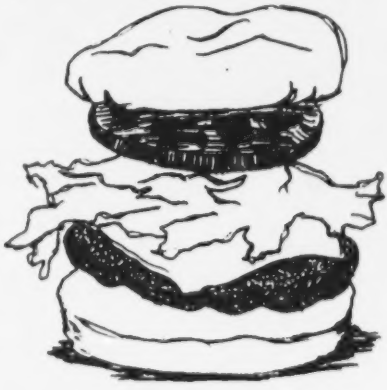
To further reinforce the idea, I keep this hand-made poster in my room:

Topic sentence

specific detail,
detail,
detail,
detail

Connect with transitions

Concluding sentence



A Good Paragraph Is Like A Good Sandwich!

For variety, I sometimes show poor paragraph form to the class by making a mixed-up sandwich while reading aloud a poor paragraph (but never one of theirs). In addition, I can slap a candy bar right in between the salami and the bologna when I read aloud a detail sentence that doesn't belong in the paragraph. "This detail is nice," I say, "but it doesn't belong here."

Whatever the case, the students learn a valuable technique throughout the process of visualization. I have used this method to teach proper paragraph form with students from seventh grade to twelfth grade, and the method has always produced the desired result regardless of the grade level of the students involved.

A Pre-Writing Strategy

by Marsha Bordner
Clark Technical College

Much of the recent research on composition has focused on the process of writing and the role the teacher should play in that process. In fact, experts on composition have written numerous articles on the value of having teachers actually write with their students. One strategy that I have found to be particularly effective involves the teacher long before the actual writing begins. He/she begins the process of writing with the students at the pre-writing stage.

In my first assignment in my beginning level composition class, I ask students to describe a person and to use their descriptions to support one particular point about that person. I also expect them to select a particular organizational pattern, such as chronological, spatial, climactic, etc.

To get my students started and to help answer the proverbial question of "what does she really want," I begin by asking them to help me brainstorm on the board. Many people, whom I could write about, come to mind. I mention my father who died ten years ago, and we conclude after some discussion that I am still too emotionally involved to sort my feelings out about him. (I hope my students will reach the same conclusion about some people they might want to describe.)

Next we move to my sister. The class begins to laugh when I tell them that the one idea that comes to my mind about my sister is her dieting habits. I write some details on the board, like her belief that she can drink three 16 ounce bottles of Tab each day and gain no weight; that she can skip lunch each day and eat two baked potatoes for dinner and still lose weight; and that she can resist eating dessert at the table at lunch and sneak it all afternoon without anyone knowing (even though she leaves a spoon in the pie pan). The class and I usually decide that the point I am trying to make is that her dieting habits deceive no one but herself and that I should develop the assignment climactically, leaving the most important point (skipping lunches in this case) until the end.

We also talk about one of my high school teachers who was always impeccably dressed. Once again, I list details of her appearance on the board and we finally conclude that my point is that she earned her students' respect by the professional image she projected. We decide that I should organize my assignment spatially, beginning with her hair and moving downward to her shoes.

Finally, I suggest my husband as a possible subject. I know that I object strongly to his need for tidiness in our household. In fact, his emphasis on neatness frequently drives me to despair. Still, at this point I cannot determine exactly what my point will be. After brainstorming on the board with help from my class, I begin to see that I have the most to say about my husband's need for organization in the kitchen. We all laugh at some of the details, like his need to see that ice cube trays are washed in hot water and allowed to dry before being refilled with water (to prevent the ice from becoming stale). It gradually becomes clear that I should use a chronological pattern to describe one evening meal in our household.

After students help me to determine a subject and focus on this first assignment, they begin to see the value of pre-writing. They also gain some insight into their teacher and find that she, too, struggles in the early stages of writing. After some brainstorming on their own, they are all ready to begin writing that first draft.

Preparing The Way To Writing An Argumentative-Persuasion Essay

by Ellen Carey
Clark Technical College

In the past, I found one of the most difficult assignments for college students in English II was the argumentative-persuasion essay. The problems stemmed from their difficulty in thinking logically through their assertions. Usually they would begin with topics that would not be arguable and then try to support them with evidence that contained certain fallacies.

To combat this problem, I created a pre-writing exercise for this particular assignment. The class is arranged into groups of five or six. Each group selects a topic and decides how it is going to present its assertion. Common examples include:

(1) City Commission Meeting: Commissioner Smith raises the issue: the use of dark-tinted automobile windows should be banned. Representatives of both sides will state their arguments.

(2) Round-table debate: Should the speed limit be raised to sixty-five?

(3) A Phil Donahue-type show: The topic of discussion for today is: "The media should not have any restraints on its reporting." The guests include: a journalist, a member of a law enforcement agency, a reporter who was served a contempt-of-court order for not revealing his sources, and a member of the judicial system.

The groups have a class session to organize their facts and evidence. The presentations are limited to ten minutes. Before the presentation begins, the audience receives critique sheets. (See attachment.) During the presentations, they will look at four areas:

(1) Topic: Is it an arguable point?

(2) The assertion: Does it have an "although-because" thesis that allows for concessions and rebuttal?

(3) Supports: Do they use ethical and logical appeals as well as emotional? Are the facts backed by authority? Are the statistics valid?

(4) Fallacies: Do the solutions contain hasty generalizations? oversimplifications? faulty cause and effect?

By going through the process of presenting and critiquing, students have the opportunity to develop the line of reasoning and to establish the sense of organization that is needed in an argumentative-persuasion essay.

ATTACHMENT

Critique: Argumentative Presentations

I. TOPIC:

Arguable: two sided?

Avoid issues which cannot be resolved in a presentation or 100 word essay. (Religion or issues such as abortion)

II. ASSERTION:

"Although-because" thesis: Allows for concessions and rebuttal?

III. SUPPORTS:

Evidence: authority/facts
Statistics
Appeal: ethical, emotional, logical

IV. FALLACIES?

Oversimplification
Hasty generalizations
Non sequitur
Post hoc: faulty cause/effect
Ad hominem
Red herring
Either/or
Genetic fallacy
Name calling/glittering generalities
Band wagon device

V. FORMAT

Distinct introduction, body, and conclusion?

Grade: Each section: 5 points Total: 25 points

10

Today In History

by Janet Gabbard
Mechanicsburg High School

FLASHBACK! (echo, echo)

"On this date in 1904, Dr. Seuss, author of such widely read children's books as *The Cat in the Hat, The Cat in the Hat Comes Back,* and *Green Eggs and Ham,* was born."

The 'today in history' bit is a regular feature of the 7:00 a.m. news broadcast on WLW radio on my way to school. Thank goodness my car has memorized the journey up Rt. 4 because the flashbacks frequently sparked flashforwards to the day's activities in the classroom.

Soon after the school year began, I found myself sharing the flashback with one or two sophomore students before the class bell rang. They seemed interested enough to pass on the bit to students afraid of missing something — "What did she say?" and to others who really like fascinating facts.

Then there was one bit, the subject now forgotten, that I shared in a corner of the chalkboard. They loved it! I tried another the next day and the next. I found students would look first at me on entering the classroom and then to that corner of the board that seemed now to be reserved for Today in History. Usually the reaction was positive unless it was some deadly dull fact like the anniversary of the laying of the trans-Atlantic cable. When a killer like that appeared, I would switch to the present and use a bit from the news of the day. Sometimes discussions were initiated by the bits and sometimes students needed more information on the subject. All to the good, I figured. They're thinking.

One day a science teacher asked the other teachers at the lunch table if they knew what day it was. He said: "It's the anniversary of Elvis and Priscilla Presley's wedding." He volunteered that one of his students (and mine) had told him. Word was spreading.

Then I discovered that some of the topics were useful for 10-minute writings in sophomore English. The guys, and a surprisingly large number of girls, wanted to write about the showdown for the Super Bowl. Or they discovered a definite caring about what happened to the money from the arms shipment to Iran. And so on, and so on.

Using the today-in-history approach seems like a simple idea, when in fact it is as complex and limitless as the little girl with the curl in the middle of her forehead. When she was good, she was very, very good, and when she was bad, she was horrid. The spontaneity was wonderful — the world brought to the classroom — always something new and different. Sometimes moral issues were attacked — violence at Christmastime, Satanism. Of course, the spontaneity was a little forced when the principal examined a week's advance of lesson plans or when a bit I had hoped would capture their imagination fell flat as plans will sometimes. Oh well, there's always tomorrow.

My focus on the 10-minute writings this year has been to promote thinking through writing. Students expressed opinions on topics that they probably never would have chosen as subjects. One young lady decided (in 10 minutes) to go to college rather than to stay at home to keep other chicks away from her man. At the very least, the volume of writing increased. Most students now fill the entire 10 minutes and some ask for more time. Finally, the influx of ideas carries over to other less interesting lessons on skills. It sets the mood for the classroom time at a new, alert level.

The Obituary

by Terry Hartley
Benjamin Logan High School

One of the most successful single assignments I use with sophomores is called "The Obituary." "The Obituary" is not quite the right name, but it (as well as the assignment) seems to catch the kids' fancy. I like to use it fairly early in the year.

The assignment begins with a general discussion of what kinds of information would be found in a newspaper account of a person's death. The students usually succeed in volunteering the necessary who, what, when, where, why, and how. Further discussions add such details as background, family, funeral arrangements, and so on. Notes on all these parts of the story are left on the board.

The second phase is the interview. The students are asked to pair up and ask each other the questions generated in the group discussion. If the number of students does not come out "even," I participate with a volunteer. The students are instructed that they must be as factual as possible in their answers, but since students are allowed to choose the time and details of their own demise, they may also choose for themselves a history for any intervening years. The fifteen-year-old imagination knows no limit at this point, and the students really enjoy creating their own life stories.

After each student has interviewed and been interviewed in turn, the balance of the class time is used to write a rough draft. From this point on the project may be treated as any other writing assignment. Since it takes place rather early in the year, I usually let the students take the piece home to polish and turn in the next day.

The real fun for the class comes in the sharing. This can be handled in a variety of ways, depending upon circumstances. In large classes I usually share the articles orally, either reading them myself or having them read by the authors. The articles, if short and not too numerous, can be typed and distributed as a "newspaper" for the class. If the time and materials permit, this may then be transferred to transparencies for use on the overhead projector.

This activity allows me to address several aspects of informative writing, but more importantly, it shows students that writing can be fun and creative while still meeting all the requisite rules and regulations of exposition.

A Progressive Portfolio

by Cynthia Heitman
Triad High School

Effective classroom writing is a progressive activity that requires organization. A good way to manage writing and still maintain a progressive scope is by using a student portfolio.

At the beginning of the year, each student is given a folder with three rings and two pockets. The pocket on the left side holds all final drafts which have been graded. The pocket on the right holds all works in progress. The mid-section contains extra notebook paper and a trait-scoring guide.

Throughout the first few weeks of school, students are given at least four opportunities to write. The topics are usually integrated with American literature and require that students do some interpretive as well as evaluative thinking/writing. Writing as a process is practiced from the pre-writing through the rough draft stages for each paper. Each paper is submitted as it is written. Papers are returned with a few comments but no letter grade. These papers are returned to the right side of the folder.

Once the students have written four papers, they are given the opportunity to choose one which they will edit and polish into a rough draft.

At first the teacher does most of the editing to show what she expects the students to do since they will eventually take full responsibility for this part of the process. Conferences between teacher and individual students usually occur early on so that patterns of problems can be identified and corrected.

Editing is finally done in pairs where students read their papers aloud to one another in order to locate critical errors in logic, organization, and so on. They then read papers silently to locate any errors in mechanics. Teacher intervention is still critical here as some students will always need to be encouraged to stay on task.

Students then return to their seats and work to complete a second draft of the paper. This is then submitted as the final paper and is graded with the trait-scoring guide, which contains elements such as subject-verb agreement, punctuation, and unity. The trait-scoring sheet is a clear reference to specific skill problems. Students can see a pattern of errors at a glance if the sheet is kept as part of the portfolio and the teacher uses it consistently with each final draft.

Critiques are made on the student paper as well, and the entire portfolio is returned to the student with a letter grade. If the student is dissatisfied with the grade, he must keep it but he may choose to write a third, corrected draft for yet a better grade and these two scores are then averaged. Both the second and third draft, because they are graded, would be placed in the left pocket. Once any final paper is graded, it is placed in the left pocket of the portfolio and the process begins again with four more writings.

Once the student has done two final drafts, he should throw away any excluded drafts which remain in the right pocket. Like any good portfolio, only the best is preserved. Students soon understand the concept of the constructive process of writing once they have collected several final drafts, and they should begin to recognize that there is always room for improvement.

Graveyards Needn't Be Grave — Or, Writing Epitaphs For Writing Proficiency

by Nancy Hempstead
Benjamin Logan High School

Teaching English literature to a heterogeneous mix of eleventh and twelfth graders prompts a teacher to cultivate great introspection. It is a challenge to convince seventeen-year olds that the thoughts of a deceased eighteenth century professor of classics from Cambridge University are relevant *or* beneficial in twentieth century America. The task is quite enjoyable and the results are gratifying when I integrate difficult content such as Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Graveyard" with the students' writing process. I seek to teach my students about Gray's universal appeal by having them explore the topic of death and his epitaph while exploring their own self-identities.

It is impossible to discuss Gray's epitaph (which comes at the end of the poem) without first reading to that point. Because Gray's vocabulary and allusions are difficult, I first provide students with a teacher-made, self-guided study sheet. On it I have typed specific comments about Gray's writing technique (imagery, mood) and the note that his topic was inspired by his own mother's death and his walk to the graveyard. Students are asked to identify the images and feelings Gray expresses by observing such things as the metaphor he uses for grave ("cell"), his use of imagery, and the "homely joys" which he guesses the deceased will miss most once he dies. Finally, we read the epitaph which Gray wrote for himself and placed at the end of this poem.

Students are asked to briefly write down their impressions of Gray, the individual, based on what he tells us in his own epitaph. After explaining to the students just what an epitaph is, we exchange impressions of Gray acquired from his epitaph (comments usually include "religious," "poor, yet rich in intangibles," "humble"). I note that the comparatively brief epitaph is actually more revealing of Gray than the preceding one hundred and sixteen lines.

With our direction established, we begin the writing process.

I use the overhead projector to display an epitaph taken from a Boot Hill tombstone:

I invite the students to speculate on the character of the author. I then read several other epitaphs written by various English literary figures such as Oscar Wilde and John Keats. We brain-storm about what an epitaph can show us: ACCOMPLISHMENTS? PERSONAL VALUES? WIT AND HUMOR? INTELLECT?

I then give students the opportunity to do some free-writing in response to the following questions:

— What kind of person are you?
— Of what one accomplishment are you proudest?
— What goals do you have for the next twenty years?
— What would you like to be remembered for after death?

Students are told to condense their responses to each question to include only major ideas. They are then instructed to re-write their ideas in such a way as to extend an image of who they are to an audience of strangers (such as passers-by in a graveyard).

The final writing is actually done on a mimeographed sheet. On it I have restated the assignment's basic requirements. At the top of the assignment sheet I draw three or four tombstones and write in sample epitaphs written by students in a prior course. It has proven helpful to "whet" their imaginations and provide flexible models. Students are permitted to write their epitaphs in rhymed verse, free verse, or prose; tombstones may also be appropriately decorated.

After grading these assignments (with a heavy emphasis on creativity), I reproduce the results for each class and they enjoy sharing their writing.

This project is brief, content-related, and non-threatening enough to afford success for even the most reluctant students. Students free-write, pre-write, and identify their audience. They are required to be precise and selective in characterizing themselves, in addition to applying Gray's very general concept to themselves. They walk in Gray's shoes and recognize that great literature has universal themes.

The Use Of A Journal In Teaching College Physics

by Bob Henscheid
Clark Technical College

Through participation in the Early English Composition Assessment Program Workshop during the summer of 1986, I realized that the use of a journal could be a valuable teaching technique in the technical courses at a two-year, post-secondary college. The unstructured nature of journal entries allows students the opportunity to express their thought processes and knowledge of the subject without a realization of that fact. Additionally, questions that students might have, but are afraid to express openly, could be related in a journal entry.

Towards this goal, I instituted the use of a journal in the Applied Physics course offered to all entering engineering students at Clark Technical College. In order to ease student anxiety that communications skills might be required in a technical course, I assured them that journal entries would not be graded on grammatical or structural content. A spiral-bound notebook was required for use by the students; however, the notebook fulfilled the threefold purpose of lecture notebook, laboratory notebook, and journal.

How to implement the journal portion of the notebook presented somewhat of a challenge. I finally decided to require journal entries in two ways. First, at the end of each lecture I wanted to ask the students to express their thoughts, ideas, or questions relating to some aspect of the lecture just presented to them. Second, during the weekly laboratory exercises I wanted the students to write down their measurements, procedures, ideas, and thoughts as they actually performed the laboratory exercise (a free-writing form of entry).

In both of these methods of journal entry, I expected the students to express their thought processes without really knowing that they were doing so. In order to get the students to actually write valuable formal entries, I intended to write the same things that I required of them.

I found the actual implementation of the journal technique to be much more difficult than its promulgation. The limited lecture time in a college physics course (3 hours/week) leaves little time to be set aside for journal entries. After the first week I found myself neglecting to ask the students to write. Additionally, the summary technique often seemed vague to the student and he/she would often write nothing of importance.

Second, I found no easy way to grade the journal entries. If I told the students they would be graded on content, they immediately built up a roadblock to creative thinking. Yet, if I did not grade the entries, the students tended to neglect to make any journal entries.

In order to correct the shortcomings of my first attempt at the use of a journal, I intend to institute the following:

1) Select a specific topic or subject to write about at the end of each lecture period.
2) Set my watch alarm to allow five minutes at the end of each lecture period for journal entry.
3) Take a small portion of the weekly laboratory period to read student journal entries.
4) Grade journal entries as participation points only.

In summary, I found the use of a journal can be a valuable teaching tool in a technical discipline, but it does require persistence and coaching on the part of the instructor in order to bring out initiative on the part of the student.

Teaching Grammar

by Cindy Herndon
Riverside High School

Last year I attended a workshop at which I picked up two novel ways to teach grammar: "Search and Destroy" and "Dictation."

"Search and destroy" is an effective way to work with grammar problems, especially at the upper levels. Each day, the teacher places three sentences on the board, each with one error. Since the first ten minutes of class is a prime time for the teaching of skills, students are to begin work immediately upon arrival. They are to identify the error, to correct it, and to state the rule which applies. After five minutes or so, the class discusses the sentences and keeps a running list of the rules for the week on the right board.

In "dictation" the teacher dictates a sentence each day. For example, "My father, the athletic director, coaches girls basketball every day during the winter." Then, he/she asks a series of yes or no questions to stimulate the student's thinking. Is there an appositive? Do you capitalize "father?" How do you spell "athletic?" Is "winter" capitalized? Is "every day" one word? Are commas used? Is "girls" a possessive? etc. This exercise provides work on MUGS (mechanics, usage, grammar, and spelling).

These two techniques are simple, yet an interesting variation on the way that grammar is typically taught.

Experiment In Free Writing

by Angie Holloway
Fairborn High School

It is the first day of school. I walk into my first period Foundations of Composition class with an untried technique — free writing. I am not sure of the class or of myself, but I forge ahead. I sit at the desk and watch this totally unknown factor —the class — straggle in. What will they be like? A tall skinny boy comes up to me and asks if he needs pencil and paper. I groan. He is an eleventh grader. Foundation classes can be anything from hoods to budding nuclear physicists. I decide I don't have any nuclear physicists.

When they have all settled down, I announce we are going to write. There are gasps. *And,* I say, we are going to write a whole page. The boy in front of me immediately declares he can't do it. Others agree. I say that's okay, but those who can will receive an "A" for the paper. A few look curious. The boy in front of me says maybe he can write, but not that much. I explain they can write anything — they don't even have to stick to the subject that is on the board. There are really two subjects — "An event that happened to you this summer" and "Anything you want."

Finally, under protest, they get out paper. I lend paper and pencil to the tall skinny boy. As they begin, I say, I ought to tell you I intend to read them all aloud — they are to be shared. As I expect, more rebellion. I hope not a riot. To slow down the groans, I say that I will write one, too. I promise not to read the names.

The rustle of paper and the scratch of pencils settles over the room. Except for the boy in front of me. "I've tried, but I can't do it," he says. His paper is blank. I suggest he begin with, "I can't write this paper" and then tell why. His paper turns out to be one of the best received by the class. From then on he is hooked.

During this eight-week experiment: one free-write a week, read aloud with written comments by peers, the class develops a rapport. They share humor, fiction, and touching personal experiences. There is Fluffy the cat who gets microwaved and Rambo Spot. One boy writes gripping papers about the trauma of a summer vehicular homicide he committed. A girl shares her struggle to kick a cocaine habit. Several have family problems. One fellow finds romance when he meets a girl named Nikki at the local county fair.

Written responses to the papers are as interesting as the papers themselves. One person comments, "Rambo Spot was pretty original, but the story line wasn't." Another says, "I like the Nikki stories, but does she know you're writing about her in comp class?" In answer to the parent problems, a peer says, "I understand the one about the clod pushing and kicking her. My dad had that problem, too." And to the cocaine habit and other addictions, a girl commented, "Kids on drugs is sometimes really sad." So many people picked up on the difficult-to-write paper that eventually responses like the following were made: "I'm very glad no one wrote about not being able to write a paper today."

After eight weeks I terminated the experiment because it was time to move on. They knew now that they could write even though they had been sure they couldn't! They were finally ready for technique — for organizing and revising and rewriting.

At the end of the semester we had a final free-write — "What did you learn?" Some comments were: "I learned I have an active imagination, and I like to put my fiction stories on paper for everyone to read;" another, "I have learned how to work out a problem on paper;" and, "It no longer embarrasses me to hear my paper read." One slow starter wrote, "I've learned a lot more about English and how to use it." One girl grew dissatisfied with her work. She said, "I think my writing would be better if I had a larger vocabulary. I get sick of the same boring phrases." Another remarked, "I have learned how to do a good paper from a bunch of badly written ones." And finally there was the one that best expressed my own feelings about the class: "People shared personal things in the free writing which I felt took guts."

As teacher and class we learned some basic truths about ourselves and about writing. Most important of all, for a composition class, we learned that writing, if painful, can also be fun and rewarding. It turned out to be an experiment that ended in great satisfaction for all of us.

Evolution Of Evaluation And Me

by Mark Hopkins
Springfield-Clark Co. JVS

Participating in the EECAP (Early English Composition Assessment Program) over the last two years, I have developed more confidence in my ability to teach and evaluate writing, especially the latter. Before the EECAP project, I would assign a topic and have the students write and revise, and give them the opportunity to share their draft with at least one other student. Usually I would assume the total responsibility of being their editor and not evaluate the quality of the writing, but merely make all those corrections so their final copies would not have so many errors. I was missing the proverbial forest for the trees. Often the grammatical corrections were only the tip of the iceberg. Even with the corrections in grammar, the writing was of poor quality. It smacked of over generalizations, cliches, few examples, and dull declarative sentences that gave the reader little insight into the topic, if the reader could stay awake through it.

After the students turned in the final copy, I would go over the mechanics again, make a few comments, and assign a grade primarily based on if the piece had focus and development and if it was grammatically correct.

Even with the advent of the writing process techniques that have generated better writing responses from the students, I still corrected the pieces in the same way until EECAP.

I had been exposed to the holistic and primary trait forms of evaluation. I had even participated in some research that a friend did on primary trait scoring while she was doing her doctoral dissertation. However, until EECAP I did not have the opportunity to actually sit down and use holistic and primary trait techniques to grade and discuss my evaluations with other teachers and reach a common ground.

In the EECAP project, I have been able to look at the aspects to be used in the evaluation, to help select them, and to develop the range and scope of the criteria for the scale. By participating in the forming of the evaluation criteria in the areas of content, organization, development, sentences, diction, and mechanics, and by discussing with other teachers the merits and faults in a piece of writing, I have been able to form a standard by which I can evaluate these traits in a piece of writing and by which I can make constructive comments.

Like most everything in life, some changes have to be made to fit the situation. I added to the criteria a "form" trait, reversed the point scale to meet the needs of my grading system, and refined the trait explanations to help clarify to the students the scope and range of the traits and the value of the points.

Developing this evaluation has afforded me the opportunity to look at the difficult traits with the same value (not just primarily grammatical), to better enable myself to make constructive comments, and to be consistent in the evaluation of each piece of writing — but most of all, it has allowed me to help students with their writing in its various stages and to create positive feelings and results with the writing experience.

The evaluation form that follows is a result of my participation in the EECAP project.

Essay Evaluation Sheet

Holistic Scoring Guide

4 = Describes, explains, persuades with vivid language and is appropriate, literate, orderly. Has all prescribed elements. Almost no errors*.

3 = Literate and orderly with good treatment of topic, but not as proficient in either description, explanation, or persuasion. Has all prescribed elements. A few errors.

2 = Somewhat literate, but treatment is superficial, unoriginal, ordinary. Has a few errors. Little analysis or examples given in description, explanation, or persuasion.

1 = A pattern of errors. Not focused, not literate, or orderly. Does not have prescribed elements.

*errors = grammatical, sentences, mechanics, spelling, etc.

Scoring Guide for Specific Areas

Overall Holistic Impression.

Content — Focus on unique ideas. Excellent analysis. Not superficial. Sophisticated.

Organization — Has good coherence, unity, transitions. Supports ideas from beginning to end.

Development — Concrete detail used in the prescribed elements of the essay.

Sentences — Complete sentences. Variety of beginnings, good flow, subordination and coordination. Not repetitive or wordy. No run-ons, fragments.

Mechanics — Grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization that does not interfere with the flow of thought.

Vocabulary/Diction — Chooses words that best express his/her meaning. Avoids cliches, colloquial (slob) or other informal words (contractions) when they should not be used.

Form — Follows directions given for the assignment. (2 possible Points).

TURN IN THIS SHEET WITH EACH FINAL COPY OF THE ASSIGNED ESSAY

WRITING SCORE CARD

Name Date												
Overall Impression												
CONTENT												
ORGANIZATION												
DEVELOPMENT												
SENTENCES												
MECHANICS												
VOCABULARY												
Form (2 points)												
TOTAL (30)												

The Conference Dilemma

by Margaret Howell
Bellefontaine High School

Last summer at the conclusion of our writing workshop with Dr. Dixon from Wittenberg, I made a personal commitment to have regularly scheduled writing conferences with my students this year, but I wasn't sure just how I was going to work it out. I decided that adapting my class management system to absorb the conferences would be beneficial to the student, as a writer, and to me, as writing counselor. Two facets of my usual classroom procedure seemed appropriate — the English notebook which I require of each student and the Workshop Way activities on which the students work during the first twenty minutes of most class periods.

The notebook is pretty standard fare with sections for study guides and worksheets, free writing, journal, and class notes. I simply added another section called "Works in Progress" and required that each student keep all composition activities which have not reached the publication stage in that section. This notebook section provides us with the raw material for a conference.

Workshop Way is a class management system originally designed for elementary classrooms. Sister Marietta Fritz, a former teacher at Chaminade-Julienne High School in Dayton, adapted this system to high school so that a teacher in any content area could use it. It appealed to me because of its opportunities for human development through the teaching of English.

A part of this philosophical and class management system is the Workshop, a set of varied tasks in which the students work independently or in groups for a specified portion of the class period. The tasks are assigned in certain predictable categories: Word Wise, an assignment in their vocabulary workbook; Puter Tutor, a small-group composition activity using Bank Street Writer with the computers; Mind Stretcher, any of a variety of activities requiring critical thinking skills; Study Board, visual displays which may enhance the learning of the current study topic; Writer's Corner, an activity involved in one of the steps of the writing process; and Job Card, a catch-all for some activities that relate to the unit we are studying at the time.

With this system already in place, I found it relatively simple to add a new workshop task this year — Face to Face. The students were given a guidesheet with a three-step procedure for this task.

1. Look at the following sections of your notebook — free writing, journals, works in progress.
2. Think of at least two questions that you would like to ask me concerning your writing. Be sure that at least one of your questions deals with either organization or content.
3. When it is time for your conference, bring your notebook up to my desk.

By scheduling five minutes for each conference, I can have conferences with all of my students in two weeks. Two problems have arisen: one is the problem of the student who would like to talk to me for the whole period about his/her ideas — I am still seeking tactful ways to end the conference without appearing to be disinterested in the student's ideas; the other is the problem of the student who never has any questions about anything he/she has written. One fairly effective solution to the latter problem is for me to turn to one of the recent composition activities in that student's notebook, read it aloud, or have the student read it to me. This sometimes alerts the student to a problem or will give me an opportunity for feedback as I respond to the written work.

Our current writing task is an original short story, an outgrowth of a literature unit on the short story. I plan to encourage the students to submit their stories this spring to the Clark Technical College writing contest. In light of that, we will complete each phase of the writing process through to the publication stage. Even if these stories are not prize-winners, I will find a way to incorporate the stories into one large book or many small booklets to be read by people not in our English class.

Recently I had an interesting conference with one particularly reticent student. She has a way with words. Her word pictures stir the imagination, and her compositions rise above the mun-

dane offerings of many of her ninth-grade peers. Her increasingly negative behavior, however, had alienated her from even her closest and most forgiving friends.

When I began talking with her about plans for her story, she said she had some ideas, but didn't want to share them, not even with me, and would not want anyone to read her story. In response, I gave her much praise for the excellent writing I had already seen and for her creative abilities. I further stated that she could keep it all within and for herself or she could share it and contribute to the enjoyment of all of us. I told her we would be the poorer for not having been allowed to share in what she had written. She left the room crying and did not return until the end of the class. This troubled me at first for I feared that she would pull farther into her shell in the future. Since that time, however, she has not only shared her writing with me but has shared it with her classmates, who give her the positive feedback she needs. The other day when rough drafts were to be handed in, she wanted to turn hers in at the end of class because some of her friends wanted to read it. I was glad I had had the conference with her because I believe it made a difference.

I have not been completely satisfied with my solution to the conference dilemma; however, having taken the plunge into the cold water, I hope to improve my techniques and eventually reach the other side of this pool of challenges for the writing teacher.

Writing An Article On A Sports Event

by Denny Lane
Bellefontaine High School

Having students write on a sports event is an activity that works well in a sports literature or journalism class. The assignment has two main objectives. First, students learn the basic elements of sports writing. Next, they develop skills that include: writing quotations (interviewing), keeping statistics, using standard newspaper style (inverted pyramid form and using either a novelty or summary lead), writing sentences with good structure and spelling, and developing an attractive headline. The materials needed for this assignment include a nerf ball and a waste basket.

The procedure is relatively simple. Two contestants (a boy and a girl) will be chosen from the group to participate in "The Battle of the Sexes" tournament. Fake background material (in the form of press releases) on each individual will be passed out to all students. The students will pretend they are sports writers and are covering this important match of "HORSE" in the "Battle of the Sexes" tournament. (In "HORSE," contestants try to make basketball shots that they hope their opponents cannot match. A letter is given to a player who misses a shot made by his opponent until five letters or the word "HORSE" is spelled and he therefore loses the game.)

Before the contestants begin play, interviews will be conducted and the fake background material will be examined by the student reporters.

The reporters will be responsible for keeping statistics and writing down "big play" situations. When the game is over, postgame interviews will be conducted and the reporters will begin to write their articles.

The following day, the articles will be collected by the teacher, and some of the articles will be read aloud. Sometimes the class will look only at certain aspects, i.e. the headline, the lead, the quotations — to see which ones are the most appropriate, the most accurate, and the most interesting. Students will usually react to papers that have clever headlines or fresh figures of speech.

Students know beforehand the elements that must be included to insure a good sports article. The papers will be graded by the teacher. He will look for evidence of these elements and assign a point value to each of them. Included here is a check list for evaluation.

Check List For Evaluation

_____ 1. Statistics
_____ 2. Big plays
_____ 3. Quotations (mostly for support)
_____ 4. Background material
_____ 5. Five W's near top
_____ 6. Inverted pyramid style
_____ 7. Sharp, terse headline (present tense)
_____ 8. Body (past tense)
_____ 9. Colorful verbs with punch
_____ 10. Very short paragraphs

This assignment not only provides entertainment for the students but also teaches them the basics of journalistic writing.

Conquering Trauma With Group Writing

by Kim Music
Mechanicsburg High School

Working with ninth graders has been a learning experience for me. It seemed to me that my freshmen were having enough difficulty adjusting to their courses, not to mention the panic they would work themselves into when asked to write a paragraph in class. Writing seemed to be a very traumatic experience for many of my students, and I wanted very much for them to overcome this great fear. I began to watch my students more closely, trying to discover techniques that made them feel at ease with the writing process and confident of their ideas. Finally, one day an idea surfaced. My students seemed most willing to share ideas when they were part of a group. This seemed to me a logical idea. After all, don't we all feel more at ease when we have a friend to share our burdens with? Then and there, I decided that I would try a group writing project.

I knew my students would scoff at my idea, unless I could give them a reason for trying the technique. Having just completed a literature section which highlighted the elements of a short story, I decided that we would attempt short stories. To give the students added incentive, I decided that we would publish the stories in a booklet, producing one copy of the booklet for each student to take home and another copy of the booklet for each member of the high school staff. Now the student writings would not only be seen in the classroom, but they would also be available to parents, teachers, and administrators.

The following Monday I presented my group writing project to my freshmen. I began by telling the students that many of them were very good at organizing ideas, developing topics, and writing grammatically correct pages. Other students had excellent ideas but often found it difficult to put those ideas onto paper; or in attempting to put the ideas down, they had many problems with mechanics and grammar and so their ideas sometimes were lost to the reader. I then explained the idea of placing three students in a group to compose a short story for a booklet to be published. When I asked the students if they liked the idea, there was a lot of enthusiasm. The trauma of putting ideas on paper was lessened by the knowledge that a friend would help.

We went to work right away on the project. I reserved the right to place the students into groups. I decided it would be easiest to work in groups of three. I chose one student for each group who had good writing ability and a good grip of grammar and mechanics. This person was the group leader. Then to each group I added two students with less grammatical and mechanical ability, but with good ideas. Together these three people would compose a short story.

The first step of our process was, of course, prewriting. We began with a class session of brainstorming. It was the end of November, and together we decided to write stories geared to a Christmas theme. In that way our booklets served as gifts to parents, teachers, and administrators. On the board I placed the word CHRISTMAS, and then, as a group, we brainstormed until the flow of ideas was fairly exhausted. I then instructed the students to take out a sheet of paper and to "free-write" about any of the ideas they found interesting. The students then moved into their groups and discussed their ideas. Each student was instructed to go home and write a beginning for a short story based on a Christmas theme.

The next day in class the students read aloud their story beginning to members of their group. Then the group discussed possible ideas to expand each story; at the end of class, the group had chosen one beginning which they wished to complete. The next few days were used for the groups to discuss and complete the story.

I then met with the groups, and we went over the rough drafts of each story in a conference. We discussed organization and logic and checked grammar and mechanics. Then the groups were to revise their stories and polish the final version for publication.

Our typing teacher was very generous and gave us time in her classroom to type the final copies of our stories. Once the final copy was typed, the group checked it once more for errors. Once the group was satisfied with the final paper, it was duplicated and then the entire class

assembled the booklets.

The students became very interested in the project and even added artwork and illustrations to the booklet. On the day the booklet was presented to the staff, the students received many positive comments. My freshmen gained confidence in their abilities as writers and were very pleased with their finished projects. I still have hesitant students when I assign a piece of writing; but for many of the students, the fear of putting words onto paper is not as traumatic as it once was.

Using Small Group Collaboration To Assess Student Writing

by Steven Olson
Clark Technical College

This assignment takes two days to complete. It may fruitfully be repeated as often as desired during the term (though not more than every two weeks, I believe). The assignment is essentially an in-class assignment, with perhaps 15-25 minutes homework for the student. During the two days of the assignment, the instructor coaches, questions, and responds, but has no outside-of-class preparation.

The assignment presupposes a process-oriented composition class, which requires students to turn in both drafts and revisions. From drafts submitted, the instructor selects one that exhibits a variety of strengths but that is not so polished as to intimidate weak writers. The draft must be typed and duplicated — I recommend that many obvious spelling and mechanical errors be corrected by the typist to avoid having students pounce on minor and obvious mistakes.

At the time of the assignment, the teacher divides the class into four or more groups, depending on size — I recommend four people per group. Each group will be responsible for evaluating *one specific aspect* of the draft. These areas are clearly defined on a separate handout, "Assessing Student Writing," that students have already received to use in assessing their own work. The handout asks clear questions about the following topics:

I. Essay-level: Is there an adequately defined and focused thesis? Is there a pattern of development? Do paragraph transitions show a controlling mind? Adequate introduction and conclusion? Does essay have unity, coherence, and arrangement?
II. Paragraph-level: Are paragraphs unified, coherent, and developed? Do they have topics that support the thesis? Are their sentence ideas tied together with adequate transitional flags and linking terms?
III. Sentence-level: Is there variety in length and structure? Effective subordination? Excessive coordination? Pronoun reference? Modifiers? Parallel structure?
IV. Diction: Proper level? Lively? Adequate use of fresh and idiomatic expressions? Any phony words? Is there variety? Redundancy? Would a thesaurus help? Cliches? Slang? Usage? Active voice?
V. If more groups are needed, they could focus on mechanics, grammar, logic, introduction and conclusion ...; or they could duplicate the focus of any other group, in order to compare results and expand coverage.

The instructor arbitrarily divides the class into effective groups. Gabby friends and very weak students should be separated. The essay-draft and, if necessary, additional copies of "Assessing Student Writing" are distributed. Each group is assigned — or requests — a specific area.

Student groups read the essay and then assess it, responding to the questions that are relevant to their group. Each student makes a list, which must refer to specific words, phrases, clauses, or paragraphs. The student may, and should, add observations from other members of the group. By the end of class, each group should have covered its topic.

For homework, each student is to go over the essay again, adding to her list.

On the second day, groups reconvene. Lists are expanded. A spokesperson is selected in each group to report that group's findings to the class. These reports should take about 10 minutes apiece. The instructor should comment, amplify, and generally attempt to create a wider class-level discussion of key points.

At the end of the second day, the draft has been painstakingly assessed; strategies for revising have been suggested, while areas of strength and weakness have been pointed out. All members of the class have contributed, and they have learned from their peers. The general and specific areas covered should be fresh in their minds to help them diagnose and revise their own drafts. Each student turns in his list to the instructor, who should probably mark it with a plus, check,

or minus in the grade book.

When repeating the assignment, groups may be changed to allow students to concentrate on new areas and to work with others. If this assignment were done four times, and groups systematically rotated, every student would, by the end of the term, have worked on assessing compositions at the levels of diction, sentence, paragraph, and thesis.

Using Writing Groups In A Writing Lab

by Carmen Olszewski
Bellefontaine High School

Writing conferences have always seemed like a good idea to me, and I have faithfully attempted them for the past three years; but it hasn't been until this year that I feel I have achieved some level of success.

In retrospect, my earlier failures with conferences were mainly due to my inability to manage time. I tried to schedule conferences with two or three students during a class period and still devote some of the class time to lecture, discussion, or group work. Having read several articles on conferences, I was convinced that I should be able to have a meaningful five-minute session with a student and yet have plenty of time left to cover other requirements of the ninth grade English program. Unfortunately, I soon discovered that what took the experts five minutes to accomplish, required fifteen to twenty minutes for me. There went my carefully organized daily lesson plan of fifteen minutes for conferences, ten for lecture, and twenty for class discussions or group work.

My first remedy was to place a clock with large, bold numbers on my desk in hopes that it would remind me to stop after five minutes. This resulted in both the student and I becoming so intent on watching the clock that little was accomplished in the session.

The next solution was to set aside two days a week as writing and conference days. This worked much better, but with a class of twenty-five students, I found that I managed to speak with a student only once a month.

Determined to have conferences work in my classroom this year, I set aside six weeks during which I turned my classroom into a writing lab. Writing, revising, and discussing writing were the only activities which took place during this time. The students were required to read a novel on their own, but that was mainly as an out-of-class activity.

On Monday of each week students were given a list of writing topics from which they were to produce three written pieces. Since they had been taught the writing process, students were expected to include the steps in composing their writings. All work was placed in a binder notebook.

I also created writing groups composed of two to three students. Student compatibility and similarity of writing problems determined the make-up of each group. Each day I listed on the board the groups I would try to work with the following day. The students would hand me their notebooks so that I could read their writing before I met with them.

Through a process of trial and error, I have found a way to work with students directly and to accomplish my overall goal for the class.

Learning Writing Skills Through The Family Genealogy

by Sarma Orlowski
Fairborn High School

I teach a class in nonfiction at Fairborn High School. During the course of the semester, I make a frantic attempt to cover at least one sampling of every type of nonfiction known to man. My less-than-enthusiastic students are also expected to write each week, usually on a topic relevant to their current reading. One assignment that has proven quite successful has been the "Family Genealogy." It is also a strategy that lends itself nicely to my three basic criteria: (1) It should generate student interest (above and beyond), (2) It is easy to grade, and (3) It makes use of pre-writing and revision activities.

I usually introduce the family genealogy as a project when we are well into the middle of a diary or first person account (*Anne Frank*, for example). I deliver a rather predictable little speech about "living history," family history, Alex Haley, and *Roots*. Then I describe their assignment to them. In six weeks (give or take a few), they will be expected to turn in a project consisting of: (A) a family tree, going back at least four generations [see attachment A], (B) a family group sheet [see attachment B], and (3) five family anecdotes.

My main, if somewhat cloaked, interest in this assignment is the writing that develops through the anecdotes. The students are told that the project grade will be equivalent to a test grade, (in my class, that would be approximately 55 points) and that this is a rare opportunity to "get an easy A." Their eyes tell me that they don't believe me for a second. In actuality, however, their grades will bear this out. Most students do very well on their genealogy. In many cases, it will be the only "A" they receive from me. (Aha! Should this perhaps be criteria number four? "The student is given a good shot at success.")

The completion of the family tree [attachment A] is fairly basic and straightforward. The first two generations can be done right in class in a matter of minutes with the teacher leading the group through each step. After that, the students usually have the idea and can do the rest of the generations on their own with the help of some relatives, phone calls, letters, family Bibles, or whatnot. I DO give them a list of sources to guide them. The family group sheet [attachment B] is equally clear, so I shall devote the rest of my attention to the writing of the anecdotes.

I prefer to have the stories written in class. The first assignment makes use of the pre-writing activity, "What Roles Have I Had in My Life." The students write down as many roles as they can think of. I sit at my desk and do the same. Then, in five minutes, I begin to list roles on the board. They can add to my list or they can add to theirs. Next they select the role that seems most interesting to them, and they write a fifteen-minute anecdote on it. I collect the papers. I read them my rough draft and ask for comments or questions. I emphasize that we are looking for ideas in these first drafts. Is it clear what you are writing about? Have you made some statement or posed a question? At my leisure, I proofread their anecdotes and give them a grade on their ideas and expression. This grade is not recorded. They know that. Mechanics are not taken into consideration. On their paper I jot down what was good or what was insufficient. They may revise their anecdotes if they are dissatisfied with my first grade. Only their revised (edited) papers will be ultimately graded.

Occasionally I group them with two other students and have them read their stories to each other. Then it is the job of the partners to evaluate the content: the ideas, the expression, the message. These comments must be written down and turned in with the anecdote. Students may turn in re-writes as many times as they wish. At least once, the student selects one anecdote to pass on to his two partners. This time it is the job of the partners to check the paper for mechanical errors. We discuss the differences between revision and editing on the day that we do this activity. I always write with the students while they are writing, and I always read what I have written to the class.

An alternate method of dealing with the anecdotes is to bring in an overhead projector and

analyze the strengths and weaknesses of a given paper with the entire class.

I have settled upon five stories as my optimal number for this project. Obviously this decision is totally at the discretion of each individual teacher, as is the subject matter for the various anecdotes. Typically, anecdote #2 describes an incident involving one of the parents. Anecdote #3 is about another relative (brother, grandfather, cousin). Anecdote #4 can be a formal letter requesting a death certificate or birth certificate, or it can be a story about a friend. Anecdote #5 is about the student's plans for the future. This last topic is admittedly hokey, but it satisfies a curiosity that has built up in me about my students as the semester progresses.

On some preordained date I collect the entire project. The students are told that it will be scored: 25 points for the five anecdotes. (Five points each. An "A" earns them five points, a "B" earns them 4, a "C" is 3, and so on). The family tree is worth twenty points. (Is any information missing?) Extra credit points can be garnered by doing the family tree beyond the required four generations, or by including extraneous material such as family photos, coats of arms, or whatever.

Some problems can crop up because of the personal nature of this project. A parent can object that genealogical research is an invasion of privacy. A child may be adopted. Some divorced households are embittered battlefields that will brook no contact with the "enemy." Oddly enough, I have only had minimal problems.

In my experience only one out of every 100 students is unable to fulfill the genealogy assignment. It is true that during the early stages of the project a significant number of students clamor that they can't possibly obtain the necessary information. However, as the assignment progresses and the anecdotes get written, most of the problems seem to take care of themselves. For the true problem child there are a multitude of rather obvious remedies. Let the adopted child research his adopted parents; the embittered battlefield child can substitute step-parents for natural parents. The "invasion of privacy" case can be handled most tactfully by excusing the child from this assignment. I assign him/her an alternative book to read and review (or test over) instead. More often than not, though, students who told me that "we aren't speaking to my dad's side of the family," astonish me by somehow getting the information anyway. In fact, they seem to take sly pride in their ingenuity at having solved the problem.

Response from parents is favorable as well. Not infrequently, they send notes in with the finished project saying how much they enjoyed working with their children on their genealogy. They are pleased to see their child taking an interest in their family's history and so forth .... I must admit that I am pleased with the assignment also. Not only does it bring the concept of nonfiction writing home to my classes, but it enables me to teach them writing skills in a uniquely personalized format. They tell me about themselves through their anecdotes and, in return, they learn about me as a person. I believe we all benefit through this interaction.

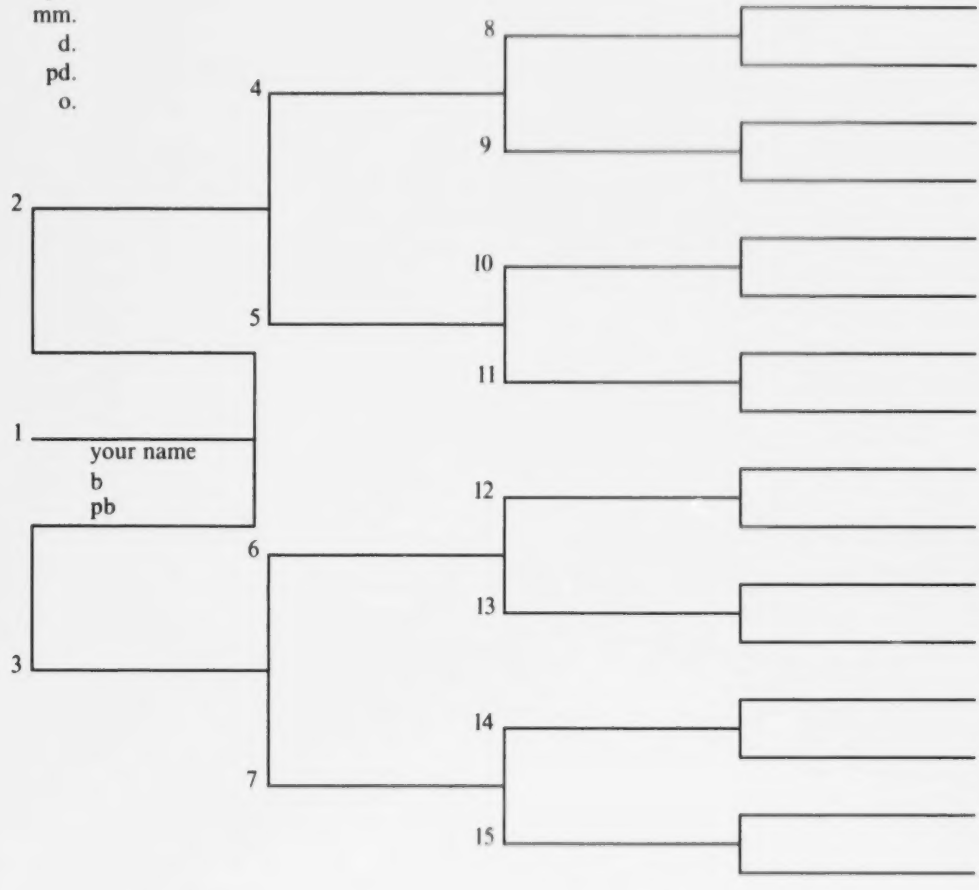
ATTACHMENT A
Pedigree Chart No. 1 (Family Line)

Date _____

Name of Compiler _____

Include the following information for each person

b.
pb.
mm.
d.
pd.
o.



_____
husband or wife
of no. 1

ATTACHMENT B

HUSBAND'S NAME _____

When Born _____ Where _____

Christened _____ Where _____

When Died _____ Where _____

When Buried _____ Where _____

When Married _____ Where _____

Other Wives (if any)
Number (1)(2) etc _____

His Father _____ His Mother's Maiden Name _____

WIFE'S MAIDEN NAME _____

When Born _____ Where _____

Christened _____ Where _____

When Died _____ Where _____

When Buried _____ Where _____

Other Husb. (if any)
Number (1)(2) etc _____

Her Father _____ Her Mother's Maiden Name _____

_____
(Husband's Full Name)

_____
(Wife's Maiden Name)

This information obtained from

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Date _____

Compiler _____

Address _____

City _____ State ____

Male or Female	CHILDREN (Arrange in order of birth)	WHEN BORN Day Month Year	WHERE BORN Town or Place County	State or Country	WHEN DIED* Day Month Year	Married
	1					Date _____ To
	2					Date _____ To
	3					Date _____ To
	4					Date _____ To
	5					Date _____ To
	6					Date _____ To
	7					Date _____ To

The Fantastic Me — Front Page News

by Ann N. Pearson
Springfield-Clark Co. JVS

My Front Page News assignment occurs in two stages, first as a get-acquainted interview and then as a writing assignment. The interview requires one or two days; the writing portion, at least a week.

To begin this assignment, I discuss interviews with the class, using examples on an overhead or in handouts. The students are assigned an interview to do on a classmate who is not from their circle of friends. I then record possible interviewer questions on the board as the class makes suggestions. (Some prompting may be needed.) Students make their own copies of the list of questions and select the target of the interview. Each pair interviews each other, covering all questions and any other information that presents itself. After the interview is completed, the students return to their own seats and write up the information. The interviews are read to the class by the writer. (Reading about someone else seems to overcome the fear of reading their own compositions.) Papers are then collected, credited to the writer, and returned.

Next, I lead the class in a brief discussion, with examples, of the make-up of a newspaper front page. Students are told to do a newspaper front page on *themselves*. These *must* include the interview done on them (with byline) and can include an autobiographical interview. Other stories could cover:

a. Travels	d. Job	g. Family members
b. Awards	e. Sports	h. Fantastic feats
c. School Activities	f. Hobbies	i. Home

j. The entire page could be done as if the student were a famous person who had just died.

As students work on this project, different types of newspaper stories are examined for form, language, headlines, etc. The students must type (single-spaced) or neatly print each story in column widths, and paste up their front page. The layout of front pages is discussed with students when they are ready for this stage, and they are guided in doing a "dummy" of their pages. The completed pages are graded for originality, neatness, writing, variety, and vocabulary. A total of five grades is given to each "front page." The "front pages" are displayed in the room. Each class can vote on an outstanding one from their period. The awards can be a ribbon or certificate.

I have found this assignment to be an effective means of getting students acquainted with one another and of teaching the basics of journalistic writing.

A Strategy For Giving Final Exams To Developmental Students

by Jackie Reeb
Clark Technical College

When it comes to final exams, students in my developmental English classes become panic-stricken, even though they are mentally prepared for these exams. To assuage this terror, I have created a pressure-free, yet comprehensive test to evaluate their writing skills.

The students are given three days to complete the exam. There is only one ground rule: they are not allowed to ask anyone for assistance except me. The exam is open book, open dictionary, open notes.

The exam consists of, first, the creation of a list of fifty topics that could be developed; second, from those fifty topics the students are to develop and write twenty-five topic sentences; third, from those topic sentences the students develop ten outlines for ten paragraphs; finally, they are to develop one outline into a clearly organized, fully supported paragraph. All four parts of the exam are graded with spelling, punctuation, and grammar rules clearly understood to be a part of this exam.

Because the students may complete the exam both in class and at home, the anxieties of test-taking are at least minimized, and their writing skills are uninhibited. Nevertheless, an instructor can still clearly evaluate the student's progress in the quarter with his/her writing skills in many areas.

This assignment also forces students to work through the three stages of the writing process: pre-write, write, and rewrite. When the students list fifty topics to write about, they are beginning the first stage of the writing process. Next, when they write twenty-five topic sentences, they demonstrate their ability to write a complete sentence and to write a clearly focused topic sentence. Instead of giving students a list of topic sentences to evaluate, the students create their own, thus establishing their understanding of what defines a good topic sentence. In the next stage the students develop an outline. They now demonstrate an understanding of paragraph unity and development on the primary and secondary level. Finally, with the last draft of a paragraph, the students clearly demonstrate their writing abilities. They have now successfully completed and mastered the writing process.

This strategy for giving final exams to developmental students ensures that students go through the writing process and yields the best possible product in an anxiety-free environment.

Objective Evaluation Of Papers

by Linda Schmitmeyer
Clark Technical College

As writing teachers, we have all been subject to criticism about our inability to be objective when grading papers. Students place less credibility on their essay grade because it is merely "one teacher's opinion" than on their clear objective math grade. We know there is some truth to this complaint. When grading a stack of papers, a teacher is not immune either to his personal notions about what makes good writing or to the struggling writer. But we are trained to look beyond our opinions and the writer when considering the merit of the paper. I believe this is true; convincing the nearly 1,900 students I talked with this school year was another matter.

As assistant director of the Early English Assessment Program, I visited the juniors who submitted writing samples for our evaluation. Their second most common response was, "How can you grade a paper when it is really just one person's opinion?" (The first question was, "Will we get our essays back?") I acknowledged the subjective response that is inevitable in any evaluation of writing. But, I also explained how we are trained to look objectively at writing. The teachers who participated in the English assessment program attended workshops in order to create a standard for evaluating writing and to practice grading. These workshops insured that our grading was consistent. The students listened politely, still unconvinced.

Then I realized the most convincing evidence came not from my words, but from the students. I passed out sample papers of the essays they wrote, one from each level of ability. I asked the students to read them carefully, considering the overall impression of the paper as well as the six analytic categories. There were not grades on the papers. I asked the students to arrange the papers according to the levels we used in our assessment project: one, two, three, or four. Then they should consider the strengths and weaknesses of the writing, using the six categories we used: content, organization, development, diction, sentences, and mechanics.

Invariably the majority of the students arranged the papers correctly. They knew the "airplane" paper was better than the "driver's permit" paper. And they knew why: the vocabulary, the sentences, the mechanics. They also knew why the "bicycle accident" paper received a four (the lowest score): the spelling, the content, the lack of organization.

This procedure demonstrates more effectively than anything I can say that grading a paper can be an objective process. The student's intuitive understanding of what makes good writing can be used to show them that grading their papers is not "just my opinion."

Personality Games As Preparation For Character Analysis

by Margaret E. Tabor
Urbana High School

One of the most crucial skills in a college preparatory English class is the ability to analyze character. Certainly we discuss character in the exploration of literature, yet many students still have difficulty composing an extended character analysis.

The typical character study by an average student (even when given clear directions to explain personality traits and changes of a fictional character) is merely to retell the plot. In exasperation, the instructor reads reams of pages of "Proctor says," "Elizabeth replies," and "Willy wrecks the car." In this morass of detail, the student rarely refers to the quirks, realizations, strengths, weaknesses, or even simple emotions of John Proctor, Willy Loman, or Hester Prynne.

In assigning a character study, many English teachers provide some or all of the following information:

1) list of suitable plays and novels;

2) discussion of character clues — actions, speech, symbols, stream of consciousness, etc.;

3) definitions of helpful terms — protagonist, antagonist, foil, catalyst, static and dynamic characters;

4) copy of instructions for introduction, thesis, topic, sentences, quotes, examples, conclusion;

5) examples of strong student essays.

Even supplied with this carefully orchestrated information, an average or unmotivated student may fall back on retelling the plot. Beyond the impetus of checking rough drafts, requiring rewrites, or assigning low grades, what may a beleaguered English teacher do to help students generate ideas?

One pre-writing activity which I have developed is a self-analysis of personality. I have students divide paper into two columns, one column for themselves, the other for the characters they have chosen to discuss. As I read a series of character traits, they write down the traits, then rate themselves and the fictional characters on a scale from one (low) to five (high). For instance, I might assign myself a *three* for boldness, while the early Macbeth rates a *five*.

The exercise usually evokes a great deal of giggling and consultation among neighbors, so I allow up to a minute per trait, depending on response. The informal exchange of ideas provokes more thinking about personality, since students are often asked for advice about friends. When students ask for my opinion, I usually give an example of behavior rather than an immediate rating. For instance, I might ask, "How gullible are you? Aren't you the one who was convinced that spaghetti grows on trees in Italy?" Soon others are exchanging anecdotes as well.

Here is a list of possible traits:

practical	loner	aggressive
emotional	honest	authoritarian
strong-willed	kind	calm
gullible	artistic	self-centered
self-aware	verbal	vulnerable
intelligent	shy	intense
diligent	leader	optimistic
responsible	humorous	self-respecting
creative	sensitive	loyal
confident	critical	stubborn
logical	egalitarian	courageous

The list, of course, is by no means complete! I usually begin with a selection of twenty traits geared to a particular class's possibilities. As a result, the activity can be adapted to different group profiles, class sizes, and lengths of time.

In the composition which follows later, good essayists often soar with the extra personality clues. Less gifted writers may only adapt a few of the traits to their final essays. In any case, these pre-writing suggestions are valuable as thinking exercises as well as a nudge toward more focused character analysis.

A Weekly Paragraph Assignment

by Rob Umble
Springfield-Clark Co. JVS

I knew that I was on the right track when I heard the following words from one of my students: "Mr. Umble, this is the first 'A' that I have ever received on a writing assignment in English." As a teacher of a Modified English class designed for students functioning below their grade level, I realized that I had to create a writing assignment in which my students could find success. My weekly paragraph assignment has provided this opportunity for my students.

Every Monday I assign a new paragraph for the week. I remind the students that I expect the paragraph to be flawless. Every sentence must be complete and there can be no misspelled words. If the students successfully follow directions, they receive an "A" for the assignment. However, if there is just one mistake, the paper receives an "F." The only possible grades for the assignment are an "A" or an "F."

In order to prompt the students into action, I always provide them with a topic sentence. Every week, these topic sentences vary in their content. This structure counts as one of their five required sentences. Here are some of the topic sentences I have used during this year:

1. It is easy to explain why _____ is my best friend.
2. I think that the school rule concerning _____ should be changed because _____
3. Because of my split second timing between 11:07 and 11:11, I always nab first place in the lunch line.
4. There are many things that I (like, dislike) about the town I live in.

At the beginning of the year, most of the topic sentences encouraged personal narratives. Recently, the emphasis has been on more descriptive paragraphs.

Normally, most slow learners would be frustrated by such an assignment. However, in my class, I always emphasize that any student can receive an "A" on this paragraph. On Monday when I assign the paragraph, the student is given ample opportunity to complete it. The paragraph is not due until Friday of the same week. When the students complete their paragraph in class, most will raise their hand and ask me to read and check it. If I discover a mistake (which I often do), I ask the student to read over the sentence where the mistake occurred. The students are encouraged to discover their own mistakes. Only after a considerable effort on their part will I point out the error for them. Once all mistakes are corrected, I place an "A" on the top of their papers. I believe that this immediate reward for good work motivates my students to try again next week.

Although there are many advantages to such an assignment, the most valuable aspect is the one-on-one time for conferences. I believe that the students benefit from this more than any other work I do during the week. Even with an extremely poorly written paragraph, I can always think of some positive remarks to bolster their confidence.

Unfortunately, I have a few students who would prefer to write as few words as possible. A string of five simple sentences is not what I am encouraging. When this becomes a problem, I require my students to include a certain number of compound and/or complex sentences in the paragraph. Failure to follow directions will result in an "F" for the assignment.

This assignment has been successful for me because all of my students know that they have the ability to do it and do it well. Even some of my weakest students have consistently received "A's". The student soon begins to realize that it is a great opportunity for an excellent grade. For me, the tremendous advantage is that I can teach important concepts in a one-on-one setting.

Planning Sheets For Formal Papers

by Janette Yoder
West Liberty-Salem High School

In the past when I asked my senior literature students to write a paper on theme or character development in a piece of literature, they were baffled about how to get started. They abhored any mention of outlining and admitted they usually made an outline after writing the paper — just to please the teacher. Their heavy sighs indicated they saw writing, especially the organizational end of it, as a real struggle.

To combat these negative feelings about pre-writing, I tried a freer approach with each student "brainstorming" on the chosen topic. The students were good at sharing their random thoughts on paper but were not very good at clustering or patterning those ideas. When I tried to check their thought processes, I received a "hodge podge" of pre-writing sheets, all in different forms which were hard to assess. I found myself doing too much of the organizing for them. I was spending too much time individually helping them see patterns of organization.

If I wanted to make sure the students were actually "thinking out" and doing the pre-writing organizational process required in good formal papers, I had to figure out a simpler format. It had to be one that wouldn't get the students stuck in those old feelings about outlining. It had to be very informal with no demands for parallelism or neatness. I wanted a sheet on which the student could do the "thinking work," but also one on which I could easily keep tabs on the development.

I decided upon a planning sheet on which the work of each stage was checked and discussed. For example, I asked the students to write an analysis of a character from *Ivanhoe*. (See Attachment A for full assignment.) Along with the assignment I gave each student a planning sheet (Attachment B). The sheet itself is so simple that I cannot believe it has had such an impact on the quality of papers the students write. Nevertheless, this simple sheet forces students to organize on their own. The students have used a planning sheet for each paper this year with no fuss about the stages of the writing process. I had decided not to bother checking their pre-writing for their most recent paper, but students asked for this planning sheet.

This year I also wanted them to "see" the writing steps so I decided for each assignment that I would do all of the pre-writing steps on a paper of my own, using a different piece of literature by the same author. On the back of my planning sheet I included my own efforts at pre-writing on the assignment. For example, for one assignment I asked students to show how Shakespeare develops a theme/idea in Hamlet. Instead of writing on Hamlet, I chose to do my pre-writing on a theme in Macbeth. (See Attachment C.) Each student, similarly, was expected to decide upon a thesis, the points that would be used to develop the thesis, and the primary/secondary sources that would be used to support the main points.

Using the planning sheet has been invaluable in helping students to learn how to pre-write. I am also pleased with the results of students seeing my own efforts at writing and I now write along with my students on all of their assignments.

ATTACHMENT A
Analysis of Character

3-5 page paper

Choose a character from *Ivanhoe.*

Write down all you have observed about that character.

Cluster these observations under 4 characteristics or traits that you see this person possessing.

List these traits and enter observations that go with each trait.

Go back through book and find specific quotes or examples to support each trait.

[Each trait must be *strongly* supported.]

ATTACHMENT B
Planning Sheet

_____
My Character

INTRODUCTION

Get Attention:
Have Thesis Clearly Stated _____

_____

Give Roadmap. Must see all 4 traits. *Briefly* mention in introduction.

BODY

Trait #1 _____

A. C.

B. D.

Trait #2 _____

A. C.

B. D.

Trait #3 _____

A. C.

B. D.

Trait #4 _____

A. C.

B. D.

ATTACHMENT C

Sample Of Pre-Writing On *Macbeth*

Thesis: In *Macbeth* Shakespeare shows that ambition becomes a dark, destructive force in the lives of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth.

Ambition in *Macbeth*

Ambition may be a positive force necessary for a person to reach otherwise unattainable heights, but ambition may also become a horrible compulsion that engulfs and controls. In *Macbeth* Shakespeare develops this dark side of ambition as it works its destruction in the lives of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Macbeth's ambition to be king begins with an awareness of his inner desire. A rise in status whets his appetite and a view of ultimate power makes ambition the driving force in his life. When given the opportunity to achieve his goal, he cannot resist. Ambition devours Macbeth.

Body

I. Awareness
   A. Witches — quotes
   B. Authority sources

II. Rise in Status
   A. Made Duke — quotes
   B. Suggestions by Lady Macbeth
   C. Authority

III. View of Power
   A. King — war
   B. Prophecy
   C. Authority

IV. Opportunity
   A. Visit of King